

Former premier flogging N.S. land

Rodney MacDonald tells potential German investors about provincial highlights

BY CHRIS SHANNON

CAPE BRETON POST

PORT HAWKESBURY — Former premier Rodney MacDonald described Nova Scotia as a summertime playground to potential German investors during a seminar that was aimed at attracting business for his client, Canadian Pioneer Estates Ltd.

Following a two-minute promotional video, MacDonald who started consulting company RMD Development Inc. in November, highlighted the province's best assets — fresh lobster available for sale right at the dock, salmon, trout and bass fishing, several daily direct flights from Halifax to European destinations, and a high-speed Internet network, which was an initiative MacDonald developed during his three-year stint as premier.

After a 10-year career in politics that ended with his Tory government's defeat in June 2009, MacDonald resigned as Inverness MLA last fall to pursue other interests.

see 'Europeans' page A2

Europeans have been touring province... Cont. from page A1

The 90-minute presentation at the Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre was the final pitch to a group of Europeans who have spent the last week touring the province and, in particular, Cape Breton, looking for potential investment opportunities.

"I've seen first-hand many of the reasons why people decide to come to Nova Scotia, and why it's important for us as a province to make sure our doors are open, our arms are open," MacDonald said, directing his comments at the two dozen German guests.

Land developer Rolf Bouman, owner of Canadian Pioneer Estates and CANEC Land Developments Inc., moved from Germany to Nova Scotia in 1992, and within a few years established a business aimed at attracting European investment by purchasing land that could be developed into summer homes or family-run businesses.

"There are probably 150 to 200 lots all through Cape Breton. We almost have a portfolio of 80 to 150 properties that we permanently develop," Bouman said, adding that government financial stability is a big reason why this region is attractive to foreign investment.

He said many of those lots have water frontage — not on the Bras d'Or Lake — but on rivers such as River Inhabitants in Richmond County where Alexandra Mashaghati and her husband, Mehrab Mashaghati, decided to buy a two-hectare property with plenty of water frontage.

She said there's no comparison between the size of that property (20,000 square metres) and a 500-metre lot they owned in Germany.

"We were here on vacation three years ago and we love the nature, we love to live outside and not in a neighbourhood where you live next door to next



Former Nova Scotia premier Rodney MacDonald highlights the province's best assets to potential German investors in Port Hawkesbury, Friday.

Chris Shannon - Cape Breton Post

door," Mashaghati said. "We had that situation in Germany and we wanted to live out in the country."

The German couple, who have two young daughters, also made a recent real estate purchase on West Bay Road in Inverness County, which also has access to the water.

The Mashaghatis received assistance from a Halifax immigration lawyer in obtaining a work visa. With a three-year work permit, they now work for Bouman in customer service and web design. She said the family's next step may be applying for permanent residency status.

Frank Hartmann had only spent time in the Yukon once before, and he's currently considering his options now that he's unemployed after a two-year contract in the transportation industry in Frankfurt, Germany, has ended.

He said the Canadian immigration rules are complex and may be a deterrent in a possible move to Nova Scotia.

"The culture has a lot of inter-

esting facets. I personally like the sea, the water. I'm considering, let's say, buying some (land), but it's still too early to answer all of these questions," Hartmann said.

"It's just to get a very first impression, and when I come back in Germany I will consider my next steps."

The rules of the Nova Scotia Nominee Program were explained by Halifax immigration lawyer Suzanne Rix.

MacDonald said one of the biggest problems associated with the program is its age restrictions of 21-55, in which to qualify.

He would like to see that age limit increased to 60 or 65, and he's already expressed that view to Immigration Minister Ramona Jennex.

"I think we should be doing all we can to promote our province as a great place to invest," MacDonald said.

"When you take a look at the developments that Canadian Pioneer Estates Ltd. have done over the past number of years ... all the work that they do increases the value of that land for Nova Scotians in general.

"That means more municipal taxes, that means more provincial taxes, and more federal taxes, which actually helps my assessment as a landowner here because it means more revenue which actually contributes to an even greater extent to our local fiscal base."

The provincial government is currently examining the merits of the cap assessment program, which was designed to protect homeowners from large surges in assessment due, in part, to expensive homes being constructed in highly sought after areas along waterfronts in places such as Chester and Baddeck.

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